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87-193

N-CO

Public Affairs, Christian Life
Officers Discuss Program Merger

By Marv Knox

NASHVILLE (BP)--Officers of the Southern Baptist Convention's Public Affairs Committee and its Christian Life Commission met Dec. 12 in Nashville to consider merging the two organizations.

The CLC is the convention's Nashville-based moral concerns agency. The PAC is a standing committee of the convention that also relates to the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, a Washington-based religious liberty organization comprised of nine Baptist conventions.

The officers' talks centered on a merger proposal that would expand the CLC program statement to include responsibility for religious liberty and church-state issues. It would dissolve the PAC and ultimately also dissolve ties between the SBC and the Baptist Joint Committee.

PAC Chairman Samuel T. Currin of Raleigh, N.C., said three major factors led up to the merger talks:

-- The CLC's September decision to open a Washington office and expand its legislative efforts regarding moral, ethical and social issues in the nation's capital.

-- The PAC's October decision to recommend the committee become its own independent agency, separate from the Baptist Joint Committee, also with a Washington office.

-- Concern over "duplication of effort and overlapping of responsibilities" of the two organizations, particularly as they relate to legislative or governmental issues. For example, abortion legislation involves ethical issues, making it the domain of the CLC. But it also involves church/state issues that touch the Baptist Joint Committee's assignment.

The CLC's decision to open a Washington office and the PAC's request to split from the Baptist Joint Committee followed a June 1987 report of a special fact-finding committee established by the SBC Executive Committee. The fact-finding committee looked into the relationship between Southern Baptists, specifically the PAC, and the Baptist Joint Committee.

That relationship has been stormy in recent years. Some Southern Baptists have said the Baptist Joint Committee is too liberal, faulting it for not supporting school-prayer and anti-abortion amendments. Opponents called for the SBC to "defund" the Baptist Joint Committee, cutting off about \$450,000 the SBC has contributed to its budget in recent years.

The fact-finding committee report suggested instead that membership of the PAC -- which comprises the SBC's membership on the Baptist Joint Committee -- be restructured. Messengers to the 1987 SBC annual meeting approved the report, increasing the SBC's representation on the 54-member Baptist Joint Committee from 15 to 18 members. The action increased at-large membership on the PAC from five to 12, reduced SBC agency executive membership from nine to five and maintained the SBC president as a member.

The fact-finding committee report also empowered the PAC to act on SBC motions and resolutions upon which the Baptist Joint Committee cannot agree and/or does not support. And it urged the CLC to consider opening a Washington office.

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However, members of the newly restructured PAC expressed frustration with their ability to be accountable to the SBC. When they met with the Baptist Joint Committee in October, the Baptist Joint Committee denied the PAC independent access to staff correspondence, itemized staff expense accounts for the past five years and staff interviews. Subsequently, the PAC voted 8-4 to recommend the SBC "dissolve its institutional and financial ties" with the Baptist Joint Committee.

The subject of financial ties already had come up in September, when the SBC Executive Committee began preparing the convention's 1988-89 operations budget. Some members claimed the convention's action on the fact-finding committee report designated the Baptist Joint Committee's portion of the budget directly to that committee; others maintained the funds were to be allocated at the PAC's discretion.

Consequently, the Executive Committee created a special committee to study the funding issue. That group is to report when the Executive Committee next meets in February.

However, the PAC/CLC proposal would make that consideration moot. Without a PAC or its equivalent, the SBC would not have a vehicle for membership on the Baptist Joint Committee, according to current bylaws.

All seven of the PAC/CLC officers who participated in the meeting have been affiliated with the movement to turn the SBC in a more conservative direction.

CLC participants included Chairman Fred Lackey, pastor of First Baptist Church of Athens, Ala.; Vice Chairman Joe Atchison, director of Baptist associational missions in Rogers, Ark.; and Secretary Rudolph Yakym Jr., a stockbroker from South Bend, Ind.

All three of the CLC officers spoke in favor of a motion to fire CLC President N. Larry Baker during the commission's meeting in September. The measure failed by a 15-15 vote. Baker had been criticized by conservative commissioners for views on abortion, capital punishment and women in ministry they said were too moderate.

PAC participants included Chairman Currin, a North Carolina state judge; Vice Chairman Albert Lee Smith, an insurance executive from Birmingham, Ala.; Recording Secretary Les Csorba III, executive director of Accuracy in Academia of Alexandria, Va.; and Richard Land, special assistant to the governor of Texas from Dallas, chairman of the PAC's planning and policy subcommittee.

All four of the PAC members voted for the committee's October recommendation to dissolve ties between the SBC and the Baptist Joint Committee.

Also participating in the meeting were the CLC's Baker; Harold C. Bennett, president and treasurer of the SBC Executive Committee; and Ernest E. Mosley, executive vice president of the Executive Committee, who provides staff assistance to the PAC.

Baker distanced the CLC from the meeting, particularly as it related to the ongoing dispute between the PAC and the Baptist Joint Committee. He said the meeting was initiated by the PAC's Currin, who contacted the CLC's Lackey. He also stressed the proposal for the merger first was drafted by the PAC's Land.

Currin, however, said: "The idea of the merger actually originated with the officers of the CLC. They broached the idea that led to the meeting."

Lackey declined to discuss who initiated the meeting, saying initiation of the meeting is not as important as its content. He noted the concept of a PAC/CLC merger "appears to be a natural outgrowth as a result of opening a (CLC) Washington office."

Baker told Baptist Press: "One thing needs to be understood clearly. The Christian Life Commission has taken no action that would move us toward a program statement different from that assigned to us by the convention.

The CLC executive noted he repeatedly expressed two concerns regarding the merger talks. First, he stressed the CLC is not taking sides in the PAC/Baptist Joint Committee dispute and pledged to continue to work with both groups. Second, he called the proposal "premature at best," citing the SBC's 50-year relationship with the Baptist Joint Committee, the Executive Committee's current study of PAC/Baptist Joint Committee funding and the PAC's own pending proposal regarding dissolution of SBC ties to the Baptist Joint Committee.

"To propose something different or new at this time would be to run ahead of the issues already under study and to circumvent established processes and procedures of the convention," he said.

Currin reported the merger proposal will be presented to members of both the PAC and the CLC and, if approved, will be presented as a joint recommendation to the Executive Committee at its February meeting.

The proposal can be handled on a "separate track" from the current PAC/Baptist Joint Committee funding study, he said. Since the merger proposal would require approval of both the Executive Committee and the full SBC, he predicted the earliest date for a completed merger would be following the June 1989 SBC annual meeting.

Executive Committee study of the merger proposal would take a "broader view" than the current funding study, Lackey predicted. Also, approval of the proposal would supercede any decision concerning dissolution of ties between the SBC and the Baptist Joint Committee.

The executive director of that organization, James M. Dunn, defended the Baptist Joint Committee: "In three of the last four annual meetings of the Southern Baptist Convention, messengers have reaffirmed working with the Baptist Joint Committee. Those who would do behind the scenes what the SBC has refused to do openly and intentionally have made clear their political agenda."

Dunn, who was not notified in advance of the merger talks, said that agenda is "a new Baptist agency in Washington to replace the historic alliance of Southern Baptists with other Baptists in the Baptist Joint Committee."

"The time has come to say forcefully that this relationship has been mutually beneficial," he said. "Clearly the generous support of Southern Baptists for the Baptist Joint Committee has been essential to this agency's work in the nation's capital. But the relationship has helped Southern Baptists as well, providing our denomination the platform from which to render a united witness to our historic Baptist commitment to religious liberty for all."

Currin said he favored the concept of a merger four or five years ago: "It's a good way to approach the problem and avoid division and the controversy of the Baptist Joint Committee/PAC dispute. ... By merging, we can save hundreds of thousands of dollars in duplicating expenses. And by dissolving ties but leaving the desire to occasionally work with the Baptist Joint Committee, we can maintain an ad hoc relationship that is non-controversial."

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F-FMB

Dollar's Free Fall
Batters Missionaries

By Erich Bridges

Baptist Press
12/17/87

TOKYO, Japan (BP)--What goes up ... must come down.

October's stock market crash has painfully reminded the world the laws of gravity also apply to economics. So has the wild free-fall of the U.S. dollar on overseas markets. And for the dollar, the bottom is not yet in sight.

The dollar's rapidly declining value in Japan and Europe is not all bad. It might help America boost its sagging exports and decrease its enormous trade deficit. But for many Americans living and working overseas -- like Christian missionaries -- the days of a strong dollar and high buying power are now a nostalgic dream.

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"It's going to hurt us terribly," said Sam James, who directs the hundreds of Southern Baptist missionaries working in Japan and other east Asian nations. "We're just not going to be able to continue appointing missionaries to Japan as regularly as we have in the past."

Southern Baptists sent 22 new missionaries to Japan in 1986. Their projection for 1988: two.

Baptists are not the only missionary group affected by the dollar's fall. Most American mission agencies pay for overseas personnel and programs with U.S. dollars. When the dollar flexes its muscle, as it did earlier in this decade, missionaries can buy more and fund more programs. When the dollar weakens, so do missionary budgets.

Japan, where a single melon can cost \$50 in a Tokyo market, is the worst case. The Presbyterian Church U.S.A. supports 42 missionaries there, including a university professor who is on the verge of retirement.

"We're looking for a replacement for him," said a Presbyterian mission official. "But we know that for a family with three children last year we had to pay \$25,000 worth of school fees. That was last year. Who knows what the school fees will be this year? So we're not just rushing around looking for young families for that particular job."

Fortunately, the official added, Japanese institutions or churches pay some missionary salaries and expenses if U.S. Presbyterians supply the personnel. Presbyterian and Southern Baptist missionaries also can rely on full financial support from American churches through their mission boards, plus cost-of-living supplements when necessary.

But many mission workers worldwide must raise their own support. Others receive salaries from sending agencies, but no cost-of-living adjustments. Most workers sent or employed by World Vision International, for example, get a fixed salary in U.S. dollars. "So they suffer and strive as the dollar goes up and down," said World Vision staffer Bruce Brander. "And if it goes down drastically, they cut back their living standards."

Personnel support aside, every American mission group in Japan faces shrinking buying power for work programs, such as evangelism and training.

The dollar has been tumbling to new postwar lows against the Japanese yen almost weekly. Southern Baptist missionaries in Japan anticipated getting 220 yen per dollar in 1986 but averaged only 165. They planned for 160 yen per dollar in 1987 but averaged barely 145.

They hope for 130 yen to the dollar in 1988, but by mid-December the dollar already had fallen to a new low of less than 127 yen. Some economists predict it will slide to 120, and if governments or market forces do not intervene, it might actually fall to 100 in the next year or so. Where would that leave missionaries, who already have lost between one-third and one-half of their buying power in two years?

"It would probably be very devastating to us," answered Richard Curtis, treasurer for the Southern Baptist missionaries in Japan. "I just don't know how we could maintain what we have on the field."

Other east Asian mission work also suffers the consequences of the Japan situation. In December alone, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board transferred almost \$200,000 intended for capital needs all over east Asia to the Japan mission organization's operating budget.

"The more money that we absolutely have to use to maintain our missionary presence in Japan, the less money is available to provide to the other missions in east Asia," explained regional director James. "As Japan's cut gets larger, the cuts for the rest of the countries have to get smaller." Meanwhile, the dollar's value also is falling in Taiwan and South Korea.

Europe is another trouble spot. The dollar fell to a new low against the German mark in December and continues to lose value against the Swiss franc, English pound and other currencies.

Especially hard hit are institutions like International Baptist Theological Seminary in Ruschlikon, Switzerland, which gets much of its financial support in U.S. dollars. Through the Foreign Mission Board, Southern Baptists funded about one-third of the seminary's 1987 budget in dollars.

Other significant dollar contributions come from other American sources and from the European Baptist Convention, composed of churches with predominantly American congregations. Nearly 60 percent of the seminary's 1986 income was in dollars. But the dollar has lost almost half of its value against the Swiss franc in only two years.

The seminary, considered by many to be the key Baptist training center in Europe, is running on a "bare bones budget" with a "skeleton staff," according to officials.

European Baptist groups, many facing their own financial problems, have picked up much of the slack with bigger gifts to the school. "They did a fantastic job. Gifts from individuals doubled last year," said missionary administrator Charles Cottle. "But it took all of that just to keep from having a deficit last year."

So far, the dollar's fall is largely limited to the industrialized economies of east Asia and Europe, and regions with currencies closely tied to those economies, such as French-speaking west Africa. The dollar, and missionary buying power, remain strong throughout much of the Third World.

"Our mission budgets have not been seriously impacted in most of the countries where we have missionaries," said Foreign Mission Board President R. Keith Parks.

But Parks believes the comparative weakness of the dollar, coupled with the maturity and growing financial strength of overseas Christians, is another reason those Christians must "assume a greater proportion of the financial burden of reaching the world" in cooperation with traditional missionary-sending countries like the United States.

Mission planners agree that the decline of the dollar is forcing three difficult but potentially positive steps: An intensive effort to manage mission work more efficiently with less money, a thorough re-evaluation of current strategies and a creative search for new ones.

But they agree on this, too: If the dollar tumble continues for a long period, it will have a major impact on how many American missionaries can be sent and effectively supported in certain countries.

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N-BJC

Supreme Court Nominee Gives
Church-State, Religious Views

By Stan Hastey

Baptist Press
12/17/87

WASHINGTON (BP)--Federal appeals court Judge Anthony M. Kennedy, President Reagan's latest nominee to the U.S. Supreme Court, told the Senate Judiciary Committee the First Amendment forbids government aid to religion and expressed the view that a judge's religious beliefs should not determine his vote on constitutional issues.

Kennedy, since 1975 a judge on the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in Sacramento, Calif., publicly revealed for the first time his views on the religion clauses of the First Amendment during two days of questioning before the Senate panel.

Two months ago, the Judiciary Committee and the full Senate rejected appeals court Judge Robert H. Bork, Reagan's first nominee to fill the seat vacated last June when former Associate Justice Lewis F. Powell Jr. retired. The president's next attempt to fill the vacancy also failed when his second nominee, federal appeals court Judge Douglas H. Ginsburg, admitted he had smoked marijuana.

Questioned by Sen. Howell Heflin, D-Ala., about his views on the establishment clause of the First Amendment, Kennedy summarized that the clause "tells us that the government should not aid or assist religion."

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He also acknowledged he has not written a single opinion as a federal judge in an establishment clause dispute and added, "I have no really fixed views on the subject."

However, the 51-year-old Sacramento native concluded it "is a fundamental value of the Constitution of the United States that the government does not impermissibly assist or aid all religions or any one religion over the other."

At the same time, Kennedy noted the tension in the First Amendment between the establishment and free exercise clauses, saying the former "in some senses works at cross purposes" with the latter. He cited as the "classic example" government-paid military chaplains.

(The religion clauses read, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." The Supreme Court has ruled that those clauses, along with the rest of the Bill of Rights, apply to the entire federal government and to the states as well.)

Kennedy, who is a Catholic, also seized the opportunity to emphasize his view that a judge's own religion should not unduly influence his decisions on religious issues.

Asked by committee Chairman Sen. Joseph R. Biden, D-Del., if he had made a prior commitment to conservative Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., to seek to reverse the court's landmark 1973 decision in *Roe v. Wade* that legalized most abortions, Kennedy replied: "I think it is important to say that if I had an undisclosed intention or a fixed view on a particular case ... perhaps I might be obligated to disclose that to you. I do not have any such views with reference to privacy or abortion ... and would not attempt to try to signal by inference or by indirection my views on those subjects."

He said further: "Now it would be highly improper for a judge to allow his or her own personal or religious views to enter into a decision respecting a constitutional matter. ... A man's or a woman's relation to his or her God and the fact that he or she may think they are held accountable to a higher power may be important evidence of a person's character and temperament. It is irrelevant to his or her judicial authority. When we decide cases, we put such matters aside."

Kennedy's alleged commitment to Helms was published by the *Washington Times*, a conservative newspaper with ties to the Unification Church of Sun Myung Moon. One of the newspaper's columnists, Cal Thomas, wrote that Helms told him Kennedy suggested he would vote to strike down *Roe v. Wade*. According to Helms' account of the exchange, he and Kennedy had a private meeting at the White House shortly after Reagan's announcement of his choice of the California judge, during which Helms said, "I think you know where I stand on abortion." According to Helms, Kennedy replied, "Indeed I do, and I admire it. I am a practicing Catholic."

Responding to Biden's questioning about the incident, Kennedy denied he had made the statement and said his "wide-ranging discussion" with Helms did not link his being a Catholic with the discussion on abortion.

Kennedy's views on these and a host of other constitutional issues were examined during 12 hours of scrutiny over a two-day period. While some philosophical differences between the conservative jurist and more liberal senators surfaced, none indicated an intention to oppose the nominee.

Two additional days of public testimony followed Kennedy's appearance before the panel, including endorsements from the American Bar Association and liberal Harvard Law School Professor Laurence Tribe. In contrast, a lukewarm endorsement by the ABA and active opposition on the part of many legal scholars, including Tribe, were major contributing factors to Bork's defeat.

Following Kennedy's practically trouble-free hearings, many observers were predicting he will receive overwhelming approval of both the Judiciary Committee and the full Senate when votes on the nomination are taken in January.

Arkansas Baptist Men
Aid Tornado Victims

By Mike Day

N- CO
(B'hood)

WEST MEMPHIS, Ark. (BP)--Tornadoes ripped through West Memphis, Ark., and the Northaven community outside Memphis, Tenn., shortly before 10 p.m. Dec. 14. Six people were killed, more than 150 injured, 273 residences destroyed and several local businesses leveled.

The storm cut a path two-tenths of a mile wide by 15 blocks long through the small northeast Arkansas city, leaving 4,500 people without power or utilities.

Within 12 hours, the Arkansas Baptist Disaster Relief Unit was on the scene in West Memphis, serving hot meals and encouragement to residents, rescue workers and relief volunteers. Wayne Ferguson of North Little Rock is on-site coordinator. Five other volunteers from across the state are working with him.

The unit, a ministry of Arkansas Baptists' Brotherhood department, is working with American Red Cross and other disaster agencies to provide aid for the victims.

"I knew the Baptists would be here," said Rosemary Hammond, food distribution coordinator for Red Cross. "I've worked a lot of disasters, and the Baptists are always there."

The volunteers located their portable kitchen and radio base just south of Interstate 40 in the hardest-hit part of town. While most of the team worked toward preparing an estimated 3,000 meals for the next three days, amateur radio operator Don Gephardt assisted out-of-state relatives searching for information about family members.

"This is a ministry that speaks without a spoken word," said Robert Tucker, director of missions for Tri-County Baptist Association, which includes churches in West Memphis. "We are giving people what they need -- food, clothing, information, etc. -- and we make some inroads for Christ by being here at this difficult time."

The difficult time for West Memphis residents will stretch into difficult months. As utility crews worked around-the-clock to restore power and services, residents realized the rebuilding process will be slow and expensive. West Memphis Mayor Keith Ingram said damage is estimated at \$22 million, but could reach as high as \$35 million.

In the midst of the devastation is irony. The marquee at the nearby West Memphis Civic Auditorium promotes a local Christmas concert urging residents to "Hear the Sounds of the Season."

For 538 families in the community, the sounds of the season consisted of the howling, freight-train-like roar of a devastating tornado -- and the friendly encouragement of Baptist volunteers.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Brotherhood Commission

Baptists Treating
Wounded In Gaza

By Art Toalston

N- FMB

Baptist Press
12/17/87

GAZA (BP)--Dean Fitzgerald has been tending to some of the victims of mid-December clashes between Israeli troops and Palestinian protesters in Gaza.

The Southern Baptist missionary physician was unable to treat a 17-year-old Palestinian who had been shot in the neck Dec. 15. The wound was too severe. The boy died. The same day, Fitzgerald operated on a young Palestinian man's arm. A bullet had blown apart an artery. The doctor reconstructed the artery using a vein from the young man's leg. Several days earlier, Fitzgerald treated the wounds of a Palestinian man and his daughter.

Tension heightened in December as Palestinians hurling stones and other objects were countered by Israeli troops' gunfire. "We've never seen it like this before ... so much tension and fighting and bloodshed and killing," said Fitzgerald of Waco, Texas, who has worked in Gaza since 1978. Gaza came under Israeli control when it was taken from Egypt in the 1967 Six-Day War.

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Workers at the Baptist Center of Culture and Light received a threat Dec. 15 that the center would be bombed if it stayed open. The center closed and will reopen "when this blows over, whenever that is," Fitzgerald said. The ministry operates a lending library and offers classes in English and handicrafts.

Clashes between Israeli troops and Palestinians in mid-December have claimed nine protesters' lives, Israeli forces said, but Palestinian sources put the death toll at 15.

Eighteen Southern Baptist missionaries in Gaza are staying at home as much as possible. "We don't want to get into anything we can't manage," Fitzgerald said. "You could get caught in a situation where you get trapped between the demonstrators and the army shooting at them."

In 1972, Southern Baptist missionary Mavis Pate was killed near a refugee camp in Gaza when Arab guerrillas ambushed the car in which she was riding. The driver, now-retired missionary Ed Nicholas, and one of his three daughters also were wounded.

Sunday services were held Dec. 13 at Gaza Baptist Church, but church activities during that week were canceled. Classes for 50 students at the Baptist-sponsored School of Allied Health Sciences were called off several days before Christmas vacation was to begin. A dozen of the students were volunteering their services at the Ahli Arab Hospital where Fitzgerald works. The hospital was operated by Baptists until 1982, when control was returned to the Anglicans, its founders.

Fitzgerald said about half of the hospital's 50 beds are filled with people injured in clashes with Israeli troops.

In Gaza, a population of more than 630,000 Palestinians is squeezed into territory 25 miles long and four to five miles wide, making it one of the world's most densely populated locations. The people are 98 to 99 percent Muslim. Some 25,000 Jewish settlers live in about 8 percent of the land.

Fitzgerald noted the frustrations of Gaza's Palestinians "have just boiled over."

"Nearly everybody around here seems to think that violence is the way to deal with the problem," said Fitzgerald, referring to Gaza's Palestinians and Israeli troops. "They all think that the only way to deal with the other group is to forcibly do something to them."

"We know that love is a lot stronger than force. Force seems like it's triumphant in every respect, but love really is a better way. I hope our Christian brothers and sisters and our missionaries here will still be able to show that God is love and that his love is a legitimate way to deal with problems."

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Gordon Hobgood Joins
SBC Annuity Board Staff

N- CO
(A. Bd.)

Baptist Press
12/17/87

DALLAS (BP)--W. Gordon Hobgood Jr. has been elected vice president/chief operating officer of the Southern Baptist Annuity Board, effective Jan. 31, 1988.

Hobgood, 55, who was chairman of the Annuity Board trustees resigned as a trustee to accept the position. He currently is managing director for the trust line of business at First RepublicBank Corp. in Dallas.

First Republic is the nation's 12th-largest bank holding corporation and the largest in the Southwest. It was created in June 1987 when RepublicBank Corp. merged with Interfirst Corp., where Hobgood was executive vice president and director of trust activities.

Hobgood has earned degrees in accounting and law and is a graduate of the Stonier Graduate School of Banking. In addition to membership in the Dallas and Texas Bar Associations, he is chairman of the financial services division of the Texas Bankers Association for 1987-88.

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Hobgood was elected unanimously Dec. 9 in a called meeting of the Annuity Board executive and administrative policy committees. B.J. Martin, trustee vice chairman, now becomes chairman under Annuity Board bylaws. Martin is vice president for church and denominational relations at Houston Baptist University.

Hobgood replaced Pat McDaniel, executive vice president for 10 years, who retired Dec. 3 while on medical leave of absence that was expected to conclude Dec. 31. "Pat had given leadership to the management study and heartily concurred in the consultant's recommendation of a functional split in his existing duties," Morgan said.

New Annuity Board structure will give Hobgood direct responsibility for the marketing division and the investment and human services departments.

Harold D. Richardson, senior vice president and treasurer, was promoted to executive vice president/treasurer. In his new position, Richardson will oversee the data processing, retirement administration, insurance services and communications divisions and the finance and accounting and endowment departments. He also will be construction liaison with Equitable Real Estate, developer/owner of a new headquarters building for the Annuity Board in Dallas.

Thomas E. Miller Jr., vice president and director of communications, was promoted to senior vice president to head the new communications division, which now will include the special services department, support services area and documentation. He will continue to direct the communications and telecommunications areas.

Richardson and Miller assumed their new duties immediately.

Hobgood is a deacon at First Baptist Church of Richardson, Texas, and is on the administrative committee of the executive board of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. He is a trustee of the Children's Medical Center of Dallas, a director of the Baptist Foundation of Texas and is on the advisory board of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He was a trustee of the Annuity Board 1969-79 and was chairman of the board 1974-75. In 1985 he again was elected by the Southern Baptist Convention as a trustee of the board and was elected chairman in February 1987.

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Elder Issues Appeal
For Support, Trust

By Linda Lawson

N-SSB

Baptist Press
12/17/87

NASHVILLE (BP)--An appeal for trust and support of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board to enable the church programs and publishing agency to continue and to expand ministries to people and churches has been sounded by President Lloyd Elder.

Support of churches and effective financial management enable the board not only to support itself through the sale of products and services but also to undertake ministries that meet needs but do not pay for themselves, Elder told state Baptist convention leaders Dec. 9 during annual planning and promotion meetings in Nashville.

"The larger and stronger the board is, the larger the mission commitment we can make back to the denomination," said Elder.

Seven of the 17 programs assigned to the board by the Southern Baptist Convention cost more money than they generate, he said. These include support of state convention work and the SBC Cooperative Program unified budget.

Also, Elder cited several of the board's new efforts that are expected to break even when they are better established. These include special ministries -- work with blacks, language and ethnic groups and handicapped people -- and the Baptist Telecommunication Network.

"The Sunday School Board is a sound financial operation," he emphasized. "As such, we remain committed to our mission and purpose to the largest extent of our resources."

Without a strong sense of trust, the board is especially vulnerable in the changing environment of society and the denomination, he added.

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"Any one quarter a church can cut us out of the budget," Elder said, by choosing not to buy literature, since the board receives no Cooperative Program funds. "I affirm the historic principle that every church is free to choose. At the same time, I appeal for the support of our churches.

"The most precious commodity we have is not the authority we have over one another but the trust we have in one another. Let us draw one another to our hearts, not control one another with our minds."

In highlighting the work of the board with the state conventions, he cited five other areas in which he said the board "is committed to doing good in the family called Southern Baptists. We want to do it consistently and we want to be trustworthy."

He pledged continuing focus on Bold Mission Thrust the denomination's campaign to present the gospel to the whole world by the year 2000, and on the urgency of evangelism.

"Those without Christ are lost, and the number grows every year inside the nation and around the world," said Elder. "There is no emphasis more important than the urgency of evangelism."

Peacemaking and response to the SBC Peace Committee report adopted by messengers to the 1987 SBC meeting and endorsed by the board's trustees also will be a top priority, he said.

The board will continue to do its work within the guidelines of the Baptist Faith and Message and Holy Scripture, he pledged: "But the authority for our work is Scripture alone. There will be no word that stands above the word of God, nor should there be."

At the same time, he said, "our plea is that no new parameters or restrictions be placed on the board so that we have to think more about living within the parameters than about the kingdom of God. We want to do faithfully and effectively the work Southern Baptists have assigned us to do."

Implementation of an internal reorganization and the Nashville properties master plan that includes expansion at its downtown Nashville location also were cited by Elder as efforts to better serve churches and make major contributions to growth in the denomination.

Elder closed with an appeal for support of the work of local churches, pastors and staff members.

"One of the most difficult tasks is the pastor or staff member trying to make a difference in the hearts and lives of people in the community. The most difficult task and the most glorious task is inside the local church where the pastor, staff and members are encouraged and equipped to carry out their tasks," he said.

"At the Sunday School Board we want to equip and to encourage that work where it matters most."